

And here is the First Folio (1623):

What's *Montague*? it is nor hand nor foote,  
Nor arme, nor face, O be some other name  
Belonging to a man.  
What? in a names that which we call a Rose,  
By any other word would smell as sweete,

There is in fact no early text that reads as our modern text does – and this is the most famous speech in the play. Instead, we have three quite different texts, all of which are clearly some version of the same speech, but none of which seems to us a final or satisfactory version. The transcendently beautiful passage in modern editions is an editorial invention: editors have succeeded in conflating and revising the three versions into something we recognize as great poetry. Is this what Shakespeare “really” wrote? Who can say? What we can say is that Shakespeare always had performance, not a book, in mind.

#### *Books About the Shakespeare Texts*

The standard studies of the printing history of the First Folio are W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio* (1955), and Charlton Hinman, *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963). J. K. Walton, *The Quarto Copy for the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1971), is a useful survey of the relation of the quartos to the folio. The second edition of Charlton Hinman's *Norton Facsimile of the First Folio* (1996), with a new introduction by Peter Blayney, is indispensable. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, keyed to the Oxford text, gives a comprehensive survey of the editorial situation for all the plays and poems.

## Introduction

*THE MERCHANT of Venice* was being performed, it seems, in London during the late summer of 1598. As Shakespeare composed the play, he combined two much older narratives, the “flesh-bond” plot (sometimes called the “hate plot”) and the “casket-test” plot (also called the “love plot”). Joining these plots proved both fertile and troublesome because the plots do not easily coexist. Shakespeare's response to the plots' ungainly relation is both elegant and ambiguous. The elegance ranges from imaginative structural symmetries to the comic and cruel dialogue between Gobbo and son to the fairly gentle satire on the superficial all-male bonhomie that flutters around the melancholic merchant of Venice, Antonio. The ambiguities and the problems for the audience arise from the way the joined plots collapse ethics into commerce, morality into finance.

The first plot involves the wooing and winning of a rich woman, “the Lady of Belmonte” (a widow in Shakespeare's apparent source, *Il Pecorone*), who subsequently disguises herself as a lawyer to save her new husband's patron, Ansaldo (Antonio in the play), from an unnamed Jewish moneylender who had financed the wooing effort in return for a loan secured by a pound of Ansaldo's flesh. Like Portia, the disguised lady demands her husband's ring as compensation for her legal efforts and later demands, undisguised, that he explain its disappearance. Ser Giovanni, a fourteenth-century Florentine writer, brought together even older narrative elements to make the short story that Shakespeare adopted and further changed. Shakespeare's principal change – if some now-unknown author had not made it first – was to substitute the casket test, a very old folkloric love trial, for Ser

Giovanni's device, which involved winning the lady only by first having sexual intercourse with her – a feat she regularly evaded by drugging her suitors' wine and then seizing their property when they failed the test. Giannetto, the suitor in Ser Giovanni's story, fails twice before learning the secret of the drugged wine; his third and successful voyage to Belmonte exposes Ansaldo, who is Giannetto's godfather, to the moneylender's flesh demand.

Replacing the sex-and-drugs portion of Ser Giovanni's narrative with the casket test meant providing a new past for many of the central characters. It meant, for example: changing the circumstances of the lady, who now is both never-married and chaste; changing the motivations of Ansaldo-Antonio; crucially, it meant inventing an *origin* for the casket test. It meant, that is, inventing Portia's dead father – "In Belmont is a lady richly *left*" (I.1.161, my italics) – and consequently raising large issues of patriarchal control and filial duty:

I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father.

(I.2.22–24)

Portia goes on to ask, "Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?" (24–25), and indeed it does seem very odd, especially after Nerissa's unconvincing answer, that Portia's life mate should be determined by "lottery" (27–28). The chance-determined test is, as Portia later says, "the lott'ry of my destiny / [It] Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" (II.1.15–16). The changes Shakespeare made in his source text threaten our sense of Portia's independence; the changes obscure the relation between Bassanio and Antonio, which is no longer based in familial ties but rests on a murkily sketched friendship that has seemed to many critics and producers to be at least partly homosexual. Finally, these changes risk making Bassanio even more avaricious than his source model

Giannetto without satisfactorily adding loyal friendship to his qualities.

Shakespeare's comic dramaturgy delights in similarities-with-differences, parallels that are illuminatingly askew. The disturbing partial parallels to Portia's situation include Shylock's daughter Jessica; Portia's waiting gentlewoman Nerissa; and (oddest of all) Shylock's servant Lancelot Gobbo. Jessica, whose "house is hell" and who is "ashamed to be" her "father's child" (II.3.2,17), finally elopes with her future husband – "I have a father, you a daughter, lost" (II.5.56). Or, the play allows us to feel that she is abducted both physically and spiritually; she says she "Did . . . steal from the wealthy Jew" (a painful term for her father), and Lorenzo describes his act as "Stealing her soul" (V.1.15,19). Gratiano gains Nerissa more abruptly than Bassanio wins Portia, but he does so as a result of the very same lottery:

You saw the mistress, I beheld the maid.

You loved, I loved . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Your fortune stood upon the caskets there,

And so did mine too as the matter falls.

\* \* \* \* \*

With oaths of love, at last – if promise last –

I got a promise of this fair one here

To have her love, provided that your fortune  
Achieved her mistress.

(III.2.198–99, 201–2, 205–8)

Lancelot Gobbo, with whom Jessica exchanges more lines than with any other character, is an employee like Nerissa, and, like Jessica, he seeks to escape Shylock's house by any means, fair or foul:

Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. . . . To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master who, God bless the mark, is a kind of devil; and to run

away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend  
 who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself.  
 (II.2.1–2, 20–24)

Lancelot resolves his comic quandary – he sees the devil wherever he looks, even in his own conscience – by getting his “true-begotten father” (32–33) to help him change masters, as indeed Elizabethan custom would endorse. The exchange of one master for another through a father’s mediation literalizes, however, some ambiguous parallels among Lancelot, Portia, Jessica, and Nerissa. Fathers, husbands, and fiancés are versions of the master; daughters and wives, of the servant.

Shakespeare’s inventions to make the casket test work may be seen elsewhere in his romantic comedies (indeed, many came from classical Roman comedy): daughters often have trouble with their fathers’ marital choices; friends, relatives, or waiting women often fall in love apparently because their friends, relatives, or mistresses have fallen in love; servants’ experiences often run alongside the wealthier or more elite characters’ experiences. And these parallels also operate in *The Merchant of Venice* to make the wooing plots intercommunicate with the flesh-bond plot in ways that generally make the love issues less frivolous than they might first appear and Shylock less monomaniacal than the Jewish moneylender in Shakespeare’s source.

Changing the way Bassanio gains Portia also meant changing the original narrative’s relation between Bassanio and Antonio; both those sets of changes also entailed, at least for Shakespeare, changes in the flesh-bond plot, especially in the motivation of the moneylender, whose original in Ser Giovanni’s story was as stereotypically and anti-Semitically Jewish as the Bassanio figure was a play-boy-adventurer and the Portia figure was a greedy sexual stereotype. Shakespeare’s original audiences had little or no direct knowledge of Jews and Jewish practices or, for that matter, international financiers of any national or ethnic origin. Shakespeare himself probably had not much

more. What Shakespeare and his audiences certainly shared was stereotypical, even mythic, “knowledge,” and in particular they would, or could, have known three quite striking Jewish dramatic characters linked with money: Gerontus in Robert Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* (performed about 1581, published 1584); Barabas in Christopher Marlowe’s immensely popular and vigorous *The Jew of Malta* (performed about 1589, published 1633); Pisaro in William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money* (composed 1598, published 1616).\*

Gerontus and Pisaro illustrate unexpected features of Shylock’s theatrical heritage. Gerontus is an unequivocally good character who appears in a few brief scenes set in the Turkish empire; there, he demands the long-overdue repayment of his loan to the Italian Mercadorus (i.e., a version of “Merchant” in mangled Spanish or Italian) and is first stalled, then refused. When the matter goes to trial and Gerontus is upheld, Mercadorus decides to renounce Christianity for Islam, an act that would legally clear all debts. Rather than force a religious conversion, Gerontus forgives the debt, and the Turkish judge concludes, “as appears by this / Jews seek to excel in Christianity, and Christians in Jewishness.” This highly ambivalent remark combines anti-Judaism with English anti-Catholicism and xenophobia – if we assume Mercadorus is meant to be Roman Catholic as well as Italian. The dialogue is otherwise remarkably free of anti-Jewish slurs, though Venice is described as “a city / Where Usury by Lucre [Money] may live in great glory” and “aliens” (foreigners to England) are heavily criticized.

If good Gerontus is a means to attack bad, indeed renegade, Christians, as Shylock also seems to be and Marlowe’s Barabas certainly is, then Haughton’s Pisaro, a Portuguese moneylender and merchant obliquely characterized as a Jew, illustrates another side of the theatrical heritage, for he

\**The Jew of Malta* is quoted from N. W. Bawcutt’s Revels Plays edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); the other plays mentioned here are quoted from the original quartos, slightly modernized.

is father to not one, but three, marriageable daughters. Shakespeare's contemporaries, playwrights and audiences alike, thought that tricking rich old men out of their daughters was even funnier than tricking them out of their money; if a young man – or in the case of Haughton's play, *three* young men – could connive his way out of debt to the old man and into marriage with his daughter, so much the better and funnier. And if, as in Haughton's play, the young men simultaneously beat the old man's favored (and foreign!) suitors, so very much the better. Clearly, the emphasis in *Englishmen for My Money* falls on intergenerational trickery and sexual desire that are as old, theatrically, as classical Greek and Roman comedy. The play's anti-money, anti-moneylending, anti-alien (as Shylock is – IV.1.347), and anti-Jewish elements do show how Lorenzo's elopement-abduction and how Salarino and Solanio's obscene crowing (II.8) over Shylock's loss of daughter and ducats could grow from traditional comic roots.

More overtly and coarsely than Shylock, Barabas serves as a means to attack Christian hypocrisy, sanctimony, and lack of charity. Like Shylock and his daughter, Jessica, Marlowe's Barabas has a beloved daughter, Abigail, who loves a gentile and who twice converts – once falsely, then truly – to Christianity. The fathers and their daughters in the two plays are often quite similar, and Shakespeare is certainly nodding to Marlowe's play when Shylock exclaims, "These be the Christian husbands! I have a daughter; / Would any of the stock of Barabbas / Had been her husband, rather than a Christian!" (IV.1.293–95; Shakespeare uses another spelling of the biblical name). Yet it is the differences between the plays that matter more than the similarities, at least to a modern audience. Marlowe's Barabas begins as a briefly sympathetic victim but evolves into an increasingly hysterical caricature – a zany, wickedly funny, homicidal (in truth, genocidal), immensely intelligent, and realistically implausible creation who runs through in five acts practically all the choices actors have made over the centuries for Shylock: comic monster, buffoon, tragic victim, flawed and overwronged

ordinary human, sadistic genius. Barabas represents a series of extremes the stereotypical Jew in drama, legend, and folklore could and did become, although he is the only instance of virtually all those possibilities in a single character.

A few examples will illustrate how Barabas and *The Jew of Malta* might have served as a quarry for the very different character and play Shakespeare created. Both Barabas and Shylock are deeply and proudly conscious of their descent from "father Abram" and their membership in "our sacred nation" (I.3.158, 45) or, as Barabas says, "unto us the promise doth belong" (II.3.48). Barabas refers to the covenant between Abraham and God (Genesis 17:1–22), but the writings of Paul (e.g., Galatians 3:13–16) and patristic theologians had worked strenuously to transfer the promise of spiritual happiness, as opposed to worldly success, from the Jews to those who believed in Jesus Christ.\*

Religious pride serves as a terrible spur for both Barabas and Shylock. At the start of what proves a killing spree, Barabas masterminds the death of Abigail's gentile lover. When she learns of her father's duplicity, she flees to a Christian convent, where he manages to kill her and all the nuns besides. Shylock, too, expresses horror at his daughter's flight and conversion – "She is damned for it. . . . My own flesh and blood to rebel!" (III.1.29, 31) – but the closest Shylock comes to Barabas's act is his terrible curse:

A diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfurt! The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now. Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin.

(III.1.77–83)

\* See "The Theology of *The Jew of Malta*" (1964) in G. K. Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), pp. 64–70.

While this curse is very far from Barabas's mass murder, Shylock shares with him the vaunting egomania that equates an act of filial impiety with the "curse . . . upon our nation," presumably the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in Matthew 23:38. That is, one daughter's disobedience her father understands as an entire nation's destruction. And the mourned loss is not the daughter, but the ducats and the diamond. Shylock finely measures his loss. His delicate precision, if that is not too horrifying a phrase, defines the distance between Barabas's grandiose violence, so terrible as to be comically unbelievable and unacceptable as fact, and Shakespeare's thought-through, human response to Jessica's betrayal of religion and father. Abigail had earlier pleased her father by helping him recover part of his fortune, and his alliterative response – "O girl, O gold, O beauty, O my bliss" (II.1.53) – prompted Shylock's despairing "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! . . . My ducats and my daughter!" (II.8.15–17). By inserting "and" into the alliterative series, Shakespeare moves from Marlowe's equation of daughter and money to a more complicated sense of the moneylender's loss: daughter *and* money rather than daughter *as* money.

Just how persons are to be valued and how they receive or forfeit value are among the play's most troubling and unsettled questions. Plainly, the gruesome horror of the Antonio-Shylock agreement puts a specific price on human flesh: one pound costs three thousand ducats. The parallel in *The Jew of Malta* is Barabas's purchase of a slave, and Shylock stresses the connection between his flesh collateral and (Christian) human slavery:

You have among you [Venetians] many a  
purchased slave,  
Which like your asses and your dogs and mules  
You use in abject and in slavish parts,  
Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,  
"Let them be free! Marry them to your heirs!"

Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds  
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates  
Be seasoned with such viands? You will answer,  
"The slaves are ours." So do I answer you.  
The pound of flesh which I demand of him  
Is dearly bought, 'tis mine, and I will have it.  
(IV.1.90–100)

From such bluntly painful unions of flesh and cost, or flesh and price, it is a small step into half-metaphorical links between money and what is "fair":

In Belmont is a lady richly left;  
And she is fair, and fairer than that word,  
Of wondrous virtues. Sometimes from her eyes  
I did receive fair speechless messages.  
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued  
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia;  
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,  
For the four winds blow in from every coast  
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks  
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,  
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,  
And many Jasons come in quest of her.  
O my Antonio, had I but the means  
To hold a rival place with one of them,  
I have a mind presages me such thrift  
That I should questionless be fortunate!  
(I.1.161–76)

No doubt, Bassanio here lists Portia's qualities – "richly left," "fair" (i.e., beautiful), "Of wondrous virtues" – in an increasing series, which values her "virtues" last and highest. The audience hears first, however, Portia's wealth in money, not virtues, and the rest of the speech wobbles among words that could represent either (or both) crass greed and high, virtuous praise: "her worth," "sunny locks . . . like a golden fleece," "means," "thrift," "fortunate."

Thus, the play links money and "fair" (Portia). It also links money and "good" (Antonio):

SHYLOCK Three thousand ducats for three months,  
and Antonio bound.

BASSANIO Your answer to that.

SHYLOCK Antonio is a good man.

BASSANIO Have you heard any imputation to the  
contrary?

SHYLOCK Ho no, no, no, no! My meaning in  
saying he is a good man is to have you understand  
me that he is sufficient. Yet his means are in  
supposition.

(I.3.9–17)

Quite deliberately, or so it seems, Shylock introduces "good" to create an ambiguity. Is Antonio "good," an honorable and virtuous man, or is he "sufficient" – "good" for the value of the loan? Once the audience's thoughts are turned this way, at least two other troubling ideas may occur. Must there be a conflict between virtue and financial sufficiency (i.e., may Antonio be "good" in only one of the two meanings)? And, more literally, will Antonio's body prove "sufficient" to pay the "forfeit" Shylock will soon propose, "an equal pound / Of your fair flesh" (147–48)?

For all the play's notorious emphasis on religious difference, economic difference is more powerful:

How like a fawning publican he [Antonio] looks.  
I hate him for he is a Christian;  
But more, for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,

Which he calls interest. Cursèd be my tribe  
If I forgive him.

(38–49)

Shylock regards hating Antonio as a given – "for he is a Christian." A greater motive for hatred is financial and competitive – "He lends out money gratis and brings down / The rate of usance here with us [i.e., Jews who lend at interest] in Venice." And, at least according to Shylock, Antonio feels the same way, converting economic antagonism into the language of religious intolerance:

Signor Antonio, many a time and oft  
In the Rialto you have rated me  
About my moneys and my usances.

\* \* \* \* \*

You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,  
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,  
And all for use of that which is mine own.

(103–5, 108–10)

Shylock then sarcastically repeats Antonio's insults, and Antonio agrees, "I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too" (127–28). Shylock now feigns (?) surprise at Antonio's anger ("how you storm") and claims he would "Forget the shames that you have stained me with" (136) – plainly untrue for either character – and that what he offers Antonio is kindly: "This is kind I offer" (139). And Bassanio, apparently without irony or wit, agrees: "This were kindness." Ambiguities in Elizabethan "kind," which could have the modern meaning of "benevolent, helpful" and also the stronger meanings "natural" and "nature," make these highly fraught exchanges. Bassanio may take the flesh-bond offer at its surface meaning, a benevolent gesture, "a merry sport" as Shylock calls it (143); another, more gruesome but more likely set of meanings underlies "This is kind I offer": economic competition is "natural" to humankind,

as is religious hatred, as is the desire for an enemy's death. When Shylock departs for dinner at Bassanio's house, it is hard not to hear cannibalistic undertones:

I am not bid for love, they flatter me;  
But yet I'll go in hate to feed upon  
The prodigal Christian.

(II.5.13–15)

Shylock has dismissed the possibility earlier – “A pound of man's flesh . . . Is not so estimable . . . As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats” (I.3.163–65) – but he returns to it when he congratulates himself on passing the “huge feeder” Lancelot, whom he endearingly likes, to Bassanio because “I would have him help to waste / His borrowed purse” (II.5.49–50). Lancelot no longer feeds on Shylock but on the money Antonio borrowed from Shylock and lent to Bassanio; hence, Lancelot “feeds on” (eats at the expense of) Bassanio, and Shylock will consume Bassanio's feast and his benefactor's flesh. Just as financial and moral terminologies intermingle for Portia, her dead father, and Bassanio in the love plot, so do financial and natural vocabularies in the hate plot.

The play, then, uses the facts and language of finance and commerce to make the fact and language of morality, values, and nature unstable and even tenuous. Shylock and Antonio agree that commercial antipathy exceeds religious difference and hatred, and Bassanio's love cannot escape a hint, at least, that it proceeds from avarice, or self-interest. One of the play's most famous speeches, beginning “Hath not a Jew eyes?” is often taken out of context as Shakespeare's declaration of a common humanity that joins us all, Jew and gentile, slave and free, male and female (see Galatians 3:8). Yet, in context, the common trait is simply the desire for revenge:

And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are  
like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If

a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility?  
Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should  
his sufferance be by Christian example? Why  
revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute,  
and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.  
(III.1.61–67)

In context, the speech traces a reciprocity of wrong, an escalation of revenge. To be human is not to recognize shared goods but to revenge exchanged wrongs, as Shylock's almost immediate response to his daughter's theft and elopement proves: “I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!” (81–82). The ways religion, commerce, and humanity mingle in the Antonio-Shylock conflict also appear, as we have seen, in Salarino and Solanio's mocking account of Shylock's “passion so confused” when he learns of Jessica's elopement: “O my ducats! O my daughter! . . . O my Christian ducats! . . . My ducats and my daughter!” (II.8.15–17). Solanio's ominous later remark *connects* Lorenzo-Jessica with Shylock's loan: “Let good Antonio look he keep his day, / Or he shall pay for this” (25–26). That is, anger and antipathy will convert Shylock's loss of his daughter into rage against Antonio, as if Shylock had helped to rob himself and could compensate for losing Jessica by punishing “good Antonio” if he fails to “keep his day.” Solanio's suspicion may not be logical, but the emotional analysis seems compelling and parallels the emotional logic that makes religious and commercial hostility interchangeable and mutually reinforcing.

Antonio does not keep his day, and in a brief scene we see him marched to jail at Shylock's insistence – “I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak” (III.3.12) – and hear Antonio acknowledge the link between not (this time) commerce and religion but commerce and law:

The duke cannot deny the course of law;  
For the commodity that strangers have  
With us in Venice, if it be denied,

Will much impeach the justice of the state,  
 Since that the trade and profit of the city  
 Consisteth of all nations.

(26–31)

Venice is a mercantile state; commercial honor, as well as continued prosperity, requires evenhanded legal treatment of citizen and alien alike. Antonio's grim conclusion, "These griefs and losses have so bated me / That I shall hardly spare a pound of flesh / Tomorrow to my bloody creditor" (32–34), follows the joyful scene (III.2) in which Bassanio triumphantly passes the casket test and wins Portia according to her dead father's lottery. Here, then, at the play's center, the fortunes of the love plot and hate plot balance – Bassanio victorious, Shylock seemingly so, Antonio hopeless.

Antonio's "tomorrow" arrives in the play's celebrated "trial scene" (IV.1), more than 450 lines long and divided into five unequal phases. The first phase establishes Shylock's intransigence and his admission that desiring Antonio's flesh cannot be rationalized:

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
 More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing  
 I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
 A losing [i.e., unprofitable] suit against him.

(59–62)

Bassanio offers money – "For thy three thousand ducats here is six" (84) – and the duke again pleads for mercy. All to no avail. Shakespeare follows his source's lead in the scene's second phase: Portia, disguised as Balthasar, "A young and learned doctor" of laws (144), is introduced by Nerissa "dressed as a lawyer's clerk," who represents "Bellario, a learned doctor" (105), from whom the Duke of Venice has requested help in deciding Shylock's case against Antonio. As the duke studies Bellario's letter introducing "Balthasar," Gratiano reviles Shylock: "harsh

Jew, . . . damned, inexecrable dog, . . . thy desires / Are wolvis, bloody, starved, and ravenous" (123, 128, 137–38). So far the scene recapitulates what has gone before: Shylock's admittedly irrational insistence on a legal bond, pleas for mercy rather than strict justice, vilifications.

Portia's entrance, however, raises a significant performance question: how do we understand her behavior toward Shylock? The final 100 lines of Act III, scene 2 (the scene in which Bassanio chooses the lead casket and wins Portia in marriage) elaborately explain Antonio's peril, Shylock's obsession – "So keen and greedy to confound a man" (276) – and Bassanio's debt to, and love for, Antonio – "The dearest friend to me, the kindest man" (292). There, too, Portia first suggests the multiple repayment of the bond: "Pay him [Shylock] six thousand, and deface the bond. / Double six thousand and then treble that" (299–300). Portia, or "Balthasar," is as well informed about the circumstances as the audience is before she arrives at court: "I am informèd throughly of the cause" (IV.1.171). How then should a director present her next line, "Which is the merchant here and which the Jew?" Possible stagings include plain ignorance, disingenuousness, a kind of collusive smirking, or even aggressive prejudice. By this point, most (but not all) productions will have clearly distinguished Antonio from Shylock by costume, and their voices and behavior will certainly have distinguished the two actors from each other for the audience. Portia's question thus also raises an important performance decision for how these actors are to *react*.

These complexities make Portia's famous "The quality of mercy is not strained" (182–200), another speech often taken out of context, much less obviously the disinterested plea it might first appear. Rather, the speech may sound, or come to sound, like the opening salvo of a barrage that steadily forces Shylock to a louder and louder insistence on the bond and a growing certainty that Portia unequivocally supports his demand:

My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,  
The penalty and forfeit of my bond.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Daniel come to judgment! Yea, a Daniel!  
O wise young judge, how I do honor thee!

\* \* \* \* \*

An oath, an oath! I have an oath in heaven!

\* \* \* \* \*

By my soul I swear  
There is no power in the tongue of man  
To alter me. I stay here on my bond.

(204–5, 221–22, 226, 238–40)

Once again, Bassanio – using Portia’s money – offers “thrice the sum . . . ten times o’er” (208–9) and begs the court “To do a great right, do a little wrong.” Once again, he is refused. After Portia establishes the mean details that Shylock has the “balance here to weigh / The flesh” but no surgeon “To stop his [Antonio’s] wounds,” the outcome appears determined, and Antonio delivers his farewell speech (262–79). Bassanio replies that he has a wife “as dear to me as life itself; / But life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life” (281–83), and Portia momentarily reminds us that the play is, after all, also a comedy of disguise – “Your wife would give you little thanks . . . / If she were by.”

All is ready for the “sentence” when Portia initiates the third phase of the scene: “Tarry a little, there is something else. / This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood” (303–4). Shylock must have his pound of flesh,

But in the cutting it if thou dost shed  
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods  
Are by the laws of Venice confiscate  
Unto the state of Venice.

(307–10)

While Gratiano jeeringly echoes Shylock’s cries, “O upright judge! . . . O learned judge!” (311), Shylock himself at-

tempts to “take this offer then. Pay the bond thrice / And let the Christian go” (316–17). Portia refuses, and in a series of further denials duplicates Shylock’s earlier insistence on the bond: “Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture, / To be so taken at thy peril, Jew” (341–42). The moment, for all the ugly sting of “Jew,” is technically a comic climax: the threat to Antonio has been turned away harmlessly, neither blood nor ducat lost.

With Shylock stymied, comic momentum, the rising rhythm of jab and counterjab, requires his punishment, and it begins, as the scene’s third phase had, with Portia’s “Tarry” (344). She now proclaims he is guilty of intended murder – “by direct or indirect attempts” – and that one half of Shylock’s goods is forfeited to his intended victim, Antonio, the other half to the state, and his life is to be at the duke’s mercy. Shylock is forced into a humiliating compromise and required to accept Antonio’s “mercy” (376). Shylock is forgiven his state fine on three conditions: the other half of his goods is to be given to Antonio in trust for Jessica and Lorenzo; “He presently become a Christian”; and his entire estate is to be bequeathed to Jessica and Lorenzo. That is, all of Shylock’s property will sooner or later be Jessica and Lorenzo’s. This financial arrangement merely defers the catastrophe Shylock foresaw when it seemed he was about to lose all instantly:

Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that!  
You take my house when you do take the prop  
That doth sustain my house; you take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live.

(372–75)

When Antonio announces his “mercy,” these words accrue meaning: “house,” “prop,” and “means” are not only material, but religious and familial. The man who saw his daughter’s elopement as equivalent to the “curse . . . upon our nation” (III.1.79) now sees his “house” – daughter and ducats – descend to a gentile. Shylock’s forced con-

version also removes the "prop" that sustains "our sacred nation" (I.3.45). Accepting these conditions, Shylock is dismissed and exits the play for ever.

The famous "trial scene" is of course not a trial, and it is possible to see it as something far nastier, a setup that turns on a technicality (flesh, no blood) and then spitefully turns back on Shylock a legal rigidity he had been duped into demanding. And all concludes with requiring him to abandon his faith on pain of death. However repugnant these vengeful acts appear to a modern audience, history and dramatic genre should make us pause before condemning Shakespeare, his play, and his characters. For instance, the blood/flesh distinction that defeats Shylock's agreement with Antonio has ample biblical precedent: Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 7:26, Deuteronomy 12:23, Acts 15:29, among others. These Scriptural distinctions and prohibitions gave rise to many important Judeo-Christian practices. Considered as comic action, Act IV, scene 1 has a long history in Western and Elizabethan drama. It exemplifies what folklorists might call "The Biter Bit" – Shylock, seemingly in command of his enemies, himself becomes a victim through the very means he employed to gain that victory, now empty and reversed upon him. Ben Jonson's *Volpone, or The Fox* is a celebrated example among plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Act IV, scene 1 also calls upon an ancient comic convention – what we call "the heavy father," a member of the older generation who wishes to control his offspring's choice of sexual partner. Traditionally, as in Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money* or in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, defeating the father liberates the child and frees the future to be different from the past. Finally, to understand how an Elizabethan audience might have understood Shylock's forced conversion, we must remember that such conversions were regarded as beneficent. Only converted could a Jew hope for (Christian) salvation, and Christian belief held that the "conversion of the Jews" (Andrew Marvell's

phrase) would precede the end of time and the world's final turn to eternal joy (see Romans 11:11–12, 15–16, 25–26).

Historical and generic qualifications cannot and must not turn us aside from the play's most pressing issue for a modern audience: the consequences of the heavy father's, the Biter's, status as a Jew. Recent centuries have seen genocidal acts on every continent of the globe, and to distinguish one horror from another is to enter upon a morally revolting calculus. Most vivid of these events for a Western audience, however, is Nazi Germany's near-extermination of European Jews, and that horror alone makes it difficult – or impossible – to consider the Christian-Venetian vilification of Shylock dispassionately. Yes, Shakespeare's Shylock has a place in a dramatic, legendary, folkloric tradition of Jewish characters, some good, some bad, some just ordinarily a mixture of traits. And, yes, Shylock is a Jew and a father, a reviled individual and an economic man dedicated to profit and commercial triumph, a member of an ancient nation and an alien wherever he lives. And, yes, the play is of its time and place, for good and ill and both good *and* ill. Do these considerations free the historical playwright William Shakespeare from a (modern) charge of anti-Semitism? Who can say? I don't know. Those considerations have certainly not saved the play from being performed as anti-Jewish nor have they prevented its performance as a grand exposition of defiance and toleration, acceptance and celebration of difference.

Questions of anti-Semitism are among the freight that the flesh-bond plot brings and are thus chief among the ambiguities I mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. The play's compensatory elegance is part of the final phase of Act IV, scene 1, the joking over Bassanio's and Gratiano's rings, now given to Portia and Nerissa, which Shakespeare adopted from *Il Pecorone*. The rings represent marital fidelity, and their exchange reifies the eternal comic conflict between homosocial and heterosexual bonds. Is Antonio more important to Bassanio than Portia?

Is Bassanio more important to Gratiano than Nerissa? This elegance extends to include the central physical facts of marriage in Act V, when the rings plainly symbolize the women's sexual organs:

If you had known the virtue of the ring,  
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,  
Or your own honor to contain the ring,  
You would not then have parted with the ring.  
What man is there so much unreasonable,  
If you had pleased to have defended it  
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty  
To urge the thing held as a ceremony?  
Nerissa teaches me what to believe:  
I'll die for't but some woman had the ring!  
(V.1.199–208)

Bawdiness and comedy have long been intimate: the making of children and the perpetuation of society are among comedy's oldest concerns.

These final gritty jokes provide a pragmatic ground for the Fifth Act's high romance, the customary Shakespearean comic conclusion of reunion, reconciliation, and renewal. Moonlit and musical – "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank! / Here will we sit and let the sounds of music / Creep in our ears" (V.1.54–56) – Portia's estate in Belmont serves, we are asked to believe, as a refuge for the characters Venice and commerce have damaged, and as a nursery for society's improved future. As the act opens, Jessica and Lorenzo await Portia's return from her transvestite adventure, and as they wait they recall stories (from Ovid and Chaucer) of doomed lovers; they joke that they are not such lovers, that they will be happy and true, but the legendary disasters are only the first of many shadows cast across the play's conventionally happy ending. Still unaware of Portia and Nerissa's deception, Bassanio, Antonio, and the other men arrive from Venice, and the comedy of their ignorance and undeceiving ensues.

Magically and offhandedly, Portia produces two letters; one explains the Balthasar deception, the other restores Antonio's fortune:

Unseal this letter soon;  
There you shall find three of your argosies  
Are richly come to harbor suddenly.  
You shall not know by what strange accident  
I chanced on this letter.  
(275–79)

Strange accidents are the lifeblood of Shakespearean romantic comedy, and it is hard to doubt that the playwright smilingly provided this letter, a graceful coup de théâtre, a scroll produced from offstage by an unseen hand. Nerissa adds a wonder we already know of:

There do I give to you [Lorenzo] and Jessica  
From the rich Jew, a special deed of gift,  
After his death, of all he dies possessed of.  
(291–93)

Jessica, Lorenzo, and Antonio are thus made happy. Yet, Antonio, restored to wealth but bereft of his friend Bassanio, remains as he was when first rich, "so sad" (I.1.1), and Jessica and Lorenzo, however materially well off, remain a couple of mixed religions subject to the ominous fates they recounted at the act's start.

When Shakespeare named the disguised Portia "Balthasar," many in his audience would have recalled that the Babylonians hostilely renamed the prophet Daniel "Baltassar" (Daniel 1:7) – he/she is thus both prophet (a comic prophet in the play) and alienated. A similar mingling of biblical references occurs at the play's end, when Lorenzo acknowledges Shylock's enforced gift: "Fair ladies, you drop manna in the way / Of starved people" (294–95). Manna saved the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16:14–15) and became a Christian means to

salvation (John 6:31–33). At the very end of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare recalls a word, “manna,” Jews and Christians shared, and a biblical moment when Jew and Christian were, or could consider themselves to be, one.

Does this intricate, concluding allusion solve the play’s complex social and religious ambiguities? No. Does it solve the play’s generic puzzles? No. What does? What might?

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## Note on the Text

THE EARLIEST prepublication records refer to this play as “a booke of the Merchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Iewe of Venyce” (22 July 1598) and “A booke called the booke of the merchant of Venyce” (28 October 1600). Use of the word “booke” strongly suggests some play-house associations, since “booke” was the theater’s term for the manuscript that regulated performances – i.e., directing entrances and exits, costume changes, sound cues, etc. James Roberts, a printer, and Thomas Heyes, a publisher-bookseller, are mentioned in these records, and together they brought out a quarto (1600): “The most excellent Historie of the *Merchant of Venice* . . . Written by William Shakespeare. . . .” This First Quarto (Q1) later served as the basis for the Second Quarto (Q2), a fraudulent text published in 1619 but claiming publication in 1600, and for the First Folio (F), published in 1623.

The First Quarto is well printed and provides only a few bibliographical problems, of which the most puzzling is the apparent presence in stage directions and speech prefixes of three characters – Salarino, Solanio, Salerio – who could easily be confused, especially if the names were abbreviated, as they often are. Following the analysis in M. M. Mahood’s edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), recent editors have retained three separate speakers rather than combining Salarino and Salerio, as was once the case, and these three appear here. In stage directions and speech prefixes, also, the play’s Jewish financier, Shylock, sometimes appears as “Jew[e]” (i.e., Jew, “the Jew”): these occasions have been standardized as “Shylock.”

Act divisions first appear in F, and are followed here along with later, mostly eighteenth-century, editorial

divisions into scenes. Further substantive changes from Q1 are listed below, with the adopted reading in italics, followed by the source of that reading (in parentheses) and the Q1 reading, both in roman letters.

- I.1 27 *docked* (Rowe) docks 113 *Is that* (Rowe) It is that  
 II.1 s.d. *Morocco* (Capell) Morochus 31 *thee* (Rowe) the  
 II.2 3–8 *Gobbo* (Q2) Iobbe  
 II.7 s.d. *Morocco* (Capell) Morrocho 69 *tombs* (Johnson) timber 77 s.d.  
*Flourish . . . cornets* (Mahood) (appears at opening of next scene in F)  
 II.8 39 *Slubber* (Q2) slumber  
 III.1 98 *Heard* (Neilson-Hill) heere  
 III.2 81 *vice* (F2) voyce 117 *whether* (F) whither  
 III.3 s.d. *Solanio* (F) Salerio  
 III.4 49 *Padua* (Theobald) Mantua 50 *cousin's* (F) cosin 53 *traject* (Rowe)  
 Tranect  
 III.5 20 *e'en* (Q2) in 70–71 *merit it, / In* (Pope) mean it, it 77 *a wife* (F)  
 wife  
 IV.1 30 *his state* (Q2) this states 31 *flint* (Q2) flints 51 *Master* (Rann)  
 Maisters 74 *bleat* (F) bleake 75 *pinos* (F) of Pines 100 *'tis* (Q2) as 208  
*thrice* (Dyce) twice 288 *No, not* (Q2) Not not 396 *GRATIANO* (Q2) Shy-  
 lock  
 V.1 41–42 *Master Lorenzo? Master Lorenzo!* (Cambridge) M. Lorenzo, &  
 M. Lorenzo 152 *give it you* (Q2) give you

## The Merchant of Venice



## [NAMES OF THE ACTORS]

THE DUKE OF VENICE  
 THE PRINCE OF MOROCCO } *Portia's suitors*  
 THE PRINCE OF ARAGON }  
 ANTONIO, *a merchant of Venice*  
 BASSANIO, *his friend, suitor to Portia*  
 GRATIANO }  
 SALARINO } *friends to Antonio and Bassanio*  
 SOLANIO }  
 LORENZO  
 SHYLOCK, *a financier*  
 TUBAL, *his friend*  
 LANCELOT GOBBO, *a clown, servant to Shylock*  
 OLD GOBBO, *father to Lancelot*  
 LEONARDO, *servant to Bassanio*  
 BALTHASAR } *servants to Portia*  
 STEPHANO }  
 SALERIO, *a messenger*  
 PORTIA, *an heiress*  
 NERISSA, *her waiting gentlewoman*  
 JESSICA, *Shylock's daughter*  
 MAGNIFICOES OF VENICE, COURT OFFICERS,  
 JAILER, SERVANTS, AND OTHER ATTENDANTS

Scene: *Venice and Belmont*

\*

## The Merchant of Venice



☞ I.1 *Enter Antonio, Salarino, and Solanio.*

ANTONIO  
 In sooth I know not why I am so sad. 1  
 It wearies me, you say it wearies you;  
 But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,  
 What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,  
 I am to learn; 5  
 And such a want-wit sadness makes of me  
 That I have much ado to know myself. 6

SALARINO  
 Your mind is tossing on the ocean,  
 There where your argosies with portly sail – 9  
 Like signors and rich burghers on the flood,  
 Or as it were, the pageants of the sea – 10  
 Do overpeer the petty traffickers 11  
 That curtsy to them, do them reverence, 12  
 As they fly by them with their woven wings. 13

SOLANIO  
 Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,  
 The better part of my affections would  
 Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still  
 Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind,  
 Peering in maps for ports and piers and roads; 19

I.1 A street in Venice 1 *In sooth* truly (Antonio answers a question asked before the dialogue and play begin); *sad* serious, thoughtful 5 *am to learn* have yet to learn 6 *want-wit* (1) dullard, (2) forgetful person 9 *argosies* large merchant ships; *portly* (1) stately, (2) swelling (billowing) 11 *pageants* i.e., like "floats" in a procession 12 *overpeer* tower above 13 *curtsy* bow, dip (i.e., while moving on the waves) 19 *roads* anchorages

- 20 And every object that might make me fear  
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt  
Would make me sad.
- SALARINO My wind cooling my broth
- 23 Would blow me to an ague when I thought  
What harm a wind too great might do at sea.  
I should not see the sandy hourglass run  
But I should think of shallows and of flats,
- 27 And see my wealthy *Andrew* docked in sand,  
28 Vailing her high top lower than her ribs  
To kiss her burial. Should I go to church  
30 And see the holy edifice of stone  
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,  
Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
- 33 Would scatter all her spices on the stream,  
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,  
And in a word, but even now worth this,  
And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought  
To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
- 38 That such a thing bechanced would make me sad?  
But tell not me: I know Antonio
- 40 Is sad to think upon his merchandise.
- ANTONIO
- Believe me, no. I thank my fortune for it
- 42 My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,  
43 Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate  
Upon the fortune of this present year.  
Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.
- SOLANIO
- Why then you are in love.
- ANTONIO Fie, fie!
- SOLANIO
- Not in love neither? Then let us say you are sad

23 *ague* fit of trembling 27 *Andrew* (name of ship) 28 *Vailing* bowing;  
*high top* topmast 33 *spices* (a common cargo from Asia to Venice) 38  
*bechanced* having happened 42 *bottom* ship 43–44 *nor is . . . year* nor is all  
my wealth risked at this one time

- Because you are not merry; and 'twere as easy  
For you to laugh and leap, and say you are merry  
Because you are not sad. Now by two-headed Janus, 50  
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time:  
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes  
And laugh like parrots at a bagpiper,  
And other of such vinegar aspect  
That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile  
Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable. 56
- Enter Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano.*  
Here comes Bassanio your most noble kinsman,  
Gratiano, and Lorenzo. Fare ye well;  
We leave you now with better company.
- SALARINO
- I would have stayed till I had made you merry, 60  
If worthier friends had not prevented me. 61
- ANTONIO
- Your worth is very dear in my regard.  
I take it your own business calls on you,  
And you embrace th' occasion to depart.
- SALARINO
- Good morrow, my good lords.
- BASSANIO
- Good signors both, when shall we laugh? Say, when? 67  
You grow exceeding strange. Must it be so?
- SALARINO
- We'll make our leisures to attend on yours. 68  
*Exeunt Salarino and Solanio.*
- LORENZO
- My Lord Bassanio, since you have found Antonio,  
We two will leave you; but at dinnertime 70  
I pray you have in mind where we must meet.

50 *Janus* Roman god with two faces, one facing the past, the other the future  
(Shakespeare also thinks [see ll. 52–55] of the classical masks of comedy and  
tragedy, one smiling, one sad, or *vinegar*) 56 *Nestor* old and solemn charac-  
ter in the *Iliad* 61 *prevented* forestalled 67 *strange* like strangers 68 *at-*  
*tend* on wait on (i.e., fit)

BASSANIO

I will not fail you.

GRATIANO

You look not well, Signor Antonio.

- 74 You have too much respect upon the world;  
They lose it that do buy it with much care.  
Believe me, you are marvelously changed.

ANTONIO

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano:  
A stage where every man must play a part,  
And mine a sad one.

GRATIANO Let me play the fool!

- 80 With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,  
81 And let my liver rather heat with wine  
82 Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.  
Why should a man whose blood is warm within  
84 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?  
85 Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice  
By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,  
I love thee, and 'tis my love that speaks:  
88 There are a sort of men whose visages  
89 Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,  
90 And do a willful stillness entertain  
91 With purpose to be dressed in an opinion  
92 Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit,  
93 As who should say, "I am Sir Oracle,  
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!"  
O my Antonio, I do know of these  
That therefore only are reputed wise  
For saying nothing, when I am very sure

74 *respect upon* concern for 81 *liver* (to Elizabethans, the seat of the emotions) 82 *mortifying* (1) deadening, (2) penitential 84 *alabaster* stone used for funerary monuments 85 *jaundice* (jaundice was associated with grief, as cause or consequence) 88 *sort* kind, type 89 *cream . . . pond* cover themselves (*mantle*) in scum (*cream*) like a stagnant pool 90 *entertain* take on, assume 91 *opinion* reputation (so also in l. 102) 92 *conceit* thought 93 *Sir Oracle* (the mock title ridicules pretended gravity)

- If they should speak would almost damn those ears, 98  
Which hearing them would call their brothers fools.  
I'll tell thee more of this another time. 100  
But fish not with this melancholy bait  
For this fool gudgeon, this opinion. 102  
Come, good Lorenzo. Fare ye well awhile;  
I'll end my exhortation after dinner.

LORENZO

Well, we will leave you then till dinnertime.  
I must be one of these same dumb wise men,  
For Gratiano never lets me speak.

GRATIANO

Well, keep me company but two years more,  
Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue.

ANTONIO

Fare you well; I'll grow a talker for this gear. 110

GRATIANO

Thanks i' faith; for silence is only commendable  
In a neat's tongue dried and a maid not vendible. 112

*Exeunt [Gratiano and Lorenzo].*

ANTONIO Is that anything now?

BASSANIO Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing,  
more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as two  
grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall  
seek all day ere you find them, and when you have  
them they are not worth the search.

ANTONIO

Well, tell me now what lady is the same  
To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage, 120  
That you today promised to tell me of.

98–99 *If they . . . fools* (See Matthew 5:22: "... but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire.") 102 *gudgeon* (proverbially, an easily caught fish); *opinion* (compared to a fish not worth catching with cheap bait) 110 *for this gear* because of what you have just said (Antonio implies that by talking he will escape Gratiano's accusation) 112 *neat ox* (the long, thin, and withered tongue is analogous to an impotent old man's penis); *vendible* marketable (i.e., marriageable)

BASSANIO

'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,  
 123 How much I have disabled mine estate  
 124 By something showing a more swelling port  
 125 Than my faint means would grant continuance.  
 126 Nor do I now make moan to be abridged  
 127 From such a noble rate; but my chief care  
 Is to come fairly off from the great debts  
 Wherein my time, something too prodigal,  
 130 Hath left me gaged. To you, Antonio,  
 I owe the most in money and in love,  
 132 And from your love I have a warranty  
 To unburden all my plots and purposes  
 How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

ANTONIO

I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it,  
 136 And if it stand as you yourself still do,  
 Within the eye of honor, be assured  
 138 My purse, my person, my extremest means  
 Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

BASSANIO

140 In my school days, when I had lost one shaft  
 141 I shot his fellow of the selfsame flight  
 The selfsame way, with more advised watch  
 To find the other forth; and by adventuring both  
 I oft found both. I urge this childhood proof  
 145 Because what follows is pure innocence.  
 I owe you much, and like a willful youth  
 That which I owe is lost; but if you please

123 *disabled* impaired, reduced 124 *something* . . . *port* somewhat exhibiting a more lavish appearance (i.e., putting up a good "front") 125 *grant continuance* allow to continue 126 *make moan* complain; *abridged* cut down, reduced 127 *noble rate* high scale 130 *gaged* pledged for, owing 132 *from* . . . *warranty* i.e., my confidence in your love authorizes 136–37 *if* . . . *honor* if your plan is as honorable as you have always been 138 *person* reputation (as collateral, but an unwittingly literal remark) 140 *shaft* arrow 141 *selfsame* same size and kind 145 *innocence* childlike sincerity, with perhaps a touch of folly

To shoot another arrow that self way  
 Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,  
 As I will watch the aim, or to find both 150  
 Or bring your latter hazard back again  
 And thankfully rest debtor for the first.

ANTONIO

You know me well, and herein spend but time 153  
 To wind about my love with circumstance;  
 And out of doubt you do me now more wrong  
 In making question of my uttermost 156  
 Than if you had made waste of all I have.  
 Then do but say to me what I should do  
 That in your knowledge may by me be done,  
 And I am prest unto it: therefore speak. 160

BASSANIO

In Belmont is a lady richly left; 161  
 And she is fair, and fairer than that word,  
 Of wondrous virtues. Sometimes from her eyes  
 I did receive fair speechless messages.  
 Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued 165  
 To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia; 166  
 Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,  
 For the four winds blow in from every coast  
 Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks 169  
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece, 170  
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand, 171  
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.  
 O my Antonio, had I but the means  
 To hold a rival place with one of them,

150–51 *or* . . . *again* either to discover both arrows (i.e., loans) or return your second arrow 153–54 *spend* . . . *circumstance* i.e., needlessly persuade me with elaborate talk 156 *making* . . . *uttermost* questioning that I will do all I can 160 *prest* ready 161 *richly left* rich by inheritance 165–66 *nothing undervalued* / *To* of no less worth than 166 *Cato's* . . . *Portia* historically wife to Brutus, the conspirator against Julius Caesar, and daughter to the honest Cato Uticensis, a tribune 169 *sunny* i.e., blond (highly valued by Elizabethan canons of beauty) 170–72 *golden* . . . *of her* (reference to Jason's mythical quest for the Golden Fleece) 171 *seat* principal residence; *strand* shore

- 175 I have a mind presages me such thrift  
That I should questionless be fortunate!
- ANTONIO
- 178 Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;  
Neither have I money, nor commodity  
To raise a present sum. Therefore go forth.  
180 Try what my credit can in Venice do;  
181 That shall be racked even to the uttermost  
To furnish thee to Belmont to fair Portia.  
183 Go presently inquire, and so will I,  
Where money is; and I no question make  
185 To have it of my trust or for my sake. *Exeunt.*

\*

∞ I.2 *Enter Portia with her waiting woman, Nerissa.*

- 1 PORTIA By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of  
this great world.
- NERISSA You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries  
were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are;  
and yet for aught I see, they are as sick that surfeit with  
too much as they that starve with nothing. It is no  
7 mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean;  
8 superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency  
lives longer.
- 10 PORTIA Good sentences, and well pronounced.
- NERISSA They would be better if well followed.
- PORTIA If to do were as easy as to know what were good  
to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages  
14 princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his

175 *thrift* (1) profit, (2) thriving 178 *commodity* goods 181 *racked* stretched, as on the rack 183 *presently* immediately (as throughout the play 185 *of my trust . . . sake* on the basis of my credit or as a personal favor (cf. *My purse, my person* in l. 138)

I.2 Belmont 1 *troth* faith; *awearry* (Portia's weariness matches Antonio's sadness in I.1) 7 *mean* small; *seated . . . mean* with neither too much nor too little (*mean* is a middle way) 8 *comes sooner by* gets sooner 8–9 *competency* modest means 10 *sentences* maxims, proverbs 14 *divine* preacher

- own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were  
good to be done than to be one of the twenty to follow  
mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the  
blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree; such a  
hare is madness the youth to skip o'er the meshes of  
good counsel the cripple. But this reasoning is not in  
the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word  
"choose"! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse  
who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed  
by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that  
I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?
- NERISSA Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at  
their death have good inspirations. Therefore the lottery  
that he hath devised in these three chests of gold,  
silver, and lead – whereof who chooses his meaning  
chooses you – will no doubt never be chosen by any  
rightly but one who you shall rightly love. But what  
warmth is there in your affection towards any of these  
princely suitors that are already come?
- PORTIA I pray thee overname them, and as thou namest  
them I will describe them, and according to my description  
level at my affection.
- NERISSA First, there is the Neapolitan prince.
- PORTIA Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but  
talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation  
to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I  
am much afeard my lady his mother played false with a  
smith.
- NERISSA Then is there the County Palatine.

17–18 *brain . . . decree* (this contrast between hot emotion and cold reason reflects Portia's conflict between desire and her father's will: see ll. 20–25) 18 *temper* temperament 19 *meshes* net for catching hares 20 *good counsel* wisdom 20–21 *not . . . fashion* not the way 24 *will of a dead father* dead father's bequest (with pun on *will* as determination) 25 *refuse none* refuse any chance at the lottery (ll. 27–28) 31 *rightly . . . rightly* correctly . . . truly 34 *overname them* list their names 34–94 (these lines are a compendium of Elizabethan stereotypes for foreigners) 36 *level . . . affection* try to decide, or to guess, how I feel toward them 38 *colt* raw adolescent 39 *appropriation* addition 40 *parts* abilities 41 *afeard* afraid 43 *County* count

PORTIA He doth nothing but frown – as who should say,  
 45 “An you will not have me, choose!” He hears merry  
 tales and smiles not; I fear he will prove the weeping  
 philosopher when he grows old, being so full of un-  
 mannerly sadness in his youth. I had rather be married  
 to a death’s-head with a bone in his mouth than to ei-  
 50 ther of these. God defend me from these two!

NERISSA How say you by the French lord, Monsieur Le  
 Bon?

PORTIA God made him, and therefore let him pass for a  
 man. In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker, but  
 he – why he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan’s, a  
 better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine:  
 57 he is every man in no man. If a throstle sing, he falls  
 straight a-capering; he will fence with his own shadow.  
 If I should marry him, I should marry twenty hus-  
 60 bands. If he would despise me, I would forgive him; for  
 if he love me to madness, I shall never requite him.

NERISSA What say you then to Falconbridge, the young  
 baron of England?

PORTIA You know I say nothing to him, for he under-  
 stands not me, nor I him. He hath neither Latin, French,  
 nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear  
 that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a  
 68 proper man’s picture, but alas who can converse with a  
 69 dumb show? How oddly he is suited! I think he bought  
 70 his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet  
 in Germany, and his behavior everywhere.

NERISSA What think you of the Scottish lord, his neigh-  
 bor?

PORTIA That he hath a neighborly charity in him, for he  
 borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore

45 *An* if; *choose* have it your way (i.e., choose whom you will) 57 *every* . . .  
*man* everyone in no one; *throstle* thrush 68 *proper* handsome 69 *dumb*  
*show* pantomime; *suited* dressed (ll. 69–71 ridicule English aping of other  
 nations’ fashions and customs) 70 *doublet* coat; *hose* breeches

he would pay him again when he was able. I think the  
 Frenchman became his surety and sealed under for an- 77  
 other.

NERISSA How like you the young German, the Duke of  
 Saxony’s nephew? 80

PORTIA Very vilely in the morning when he is sober, and  
 most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk. When  
 he is best he is a little worse than a man, and when he is  
 worst he is little better than a beast. And the worst fall 84  
 that ever fell, I hope I shall make shift to go without 85  
 him.

NERISSA If he should offer to choose, and choose the  
 right casket, you should refuse to perform your father’s  
 will if you should refuse to accept him.

PORTIA Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee set a 90  
 deep glass of Rhenish wine on the contrary casket, for if 91  
 the devil be within and that temptation without, I  
 know he will choose it. I will do anything, Nerissa, ere  
 I will be married to a sponge.

NERISSA You need not fear, lady, the having any of these  
 lords. They have acquainted me with their determina-  
 tions, which is indeed to return to their home and to  
 trouble you with no more suit, unless you may be won  
 by some other sort than your father’s imposition, de- 99  
 pending on the caskets. 100

PORTIA If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste 101  
 as Diana unless I be obtained by the manner of my fa- 102  
 ther’s will. I am glad this parcel of wooers are so reason-  
 able, for there is not one among them but I dote on his  
 very absence; and I pray God grant them a fair depart-  
 ure.

77 *became his surety* (a reference to the historical Franco-Scottish alliance  
 against England); *sealed under* put his seal under the Scot’s, as a further guar-  
 antor (a comic parallel to the Antonio-Bassanio relation) 84 *And* if 85  
*make shift* manage 91 *contrary* other, or “wrong” 99 *sort* way 101 *Sibylla*  
 prophetess to whom Apollo promised as many years of life as there were  
 grains in her handful of sand 102 *Diana* goddess of chastity

- NERISSA Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came hither in the company of the Marquis of Montferrat?
- 110 PORTIA Yes, yes, it was Bassanio – as I think, so was he called.
- NERISSA True, madam. He, of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady.
- PORTIA I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise.  
*Enter a Servingman.*  
How now, what news?
- SERVINGMAN The four strangers seek for you, madam, to take their leave, and there is a forerunner come from
- 120 a fifth, the Prince of Morocco, who brings word the prince his master will be here tonight.
- PORTIA If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good heart as I can bid the other four farewell, I should be
- 124 glad of his approach. If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should
- 126 shrive me than wive me. Come, Nerissa. Sirrah, go before. Whiles we shut the gate upon one wooer, another knocks at the door. *Exeunt.*

\*

~ I.3 *Enter Bassanio with Shylock the Jew.*

- 1 SHYLOCK Three thousand ducats – well.
- BASSANIO Ay, sir, for three months.
- SHYLOCK For three months – well.

124–26 *If . . . wive me* i.e., if his inner nature (*condition*) is saintly and his outer appearance (*complexion*) devilish, I'd want him to hear my confession (*shrive me*) rather than marry me (but note the implicit racism, since Elizabethans often regarded Moroccans as "black," supposedly the devil's skin color) 126 *Sirrah* (form of address to servants)

I.3 Venice 1 *ducats* gold coins (3,000 ducats was a very large sum; later a diamond is valued at 2,000 ducats: see III.1.77–78)

- BASSANIO For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound. 5
- SHYLOCK Antonio shall become bound – well.
- BASSANIO May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? 7  
Shall I know your answer?
- SHYLOCK Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound. 10
- BASSANIO Your answer to that.
- SHYLOCK Antonio is a good man. 12
- BASSANIO Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?
- SHYLOCK Ho no, no, no, no! My meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient. Yet his means are in supposition. He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies; I understand, moreover, upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath squandered abroad. But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves – I mean pirates; and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks. The man is, notwithstanding, sufficient. Three thousand ducats – I think I may take his bond. 17  
19  
20  
21
- BASSANIO Be assured you may.
- SHYLOCK I will be assured I may; and that I may be assured, I will bethink me. May I speak with Antonio? 30
- BASSANIO If it please you to dine with us. 31
- SHYLOCK Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into! I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, 32

5 *bound* responsible, as a surety 7 *stead* accommodate 12 *good* reliable in business dealings 17 *sufficient* good as a guarantor; *in supposition* uncertain 19 *Rialto* area of the Venetian Exchange (i.e., "stock exchange" or "bourse") 21 *squandered* scattered (but with a hint of foolish financial speculation) 31 *habitation* body 32–33 *Nazarite . . . into* (reference to Jesus' [the Nazarite] casting of evil spirits into a herd of swine; see Luke 8:26–33, Mark 5:1–13, Matthew 8:28–32)

35 walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you. What news on the Rialto? Who is he comes here?

*Enter Antonio.*

BASSANIO

This is Signor Antonio.

SHYLOCK *[Aside]*

38 How like a fawning publican he looks.  
39 I hate him for he is a Christian;  
40 But more, for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
42 The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
43 If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls interest. Cursèd be my tribe  
If I forgive him.

BASSANIO Shylock, do you hear?

SHYLOCK

50 I am debating of my present store,  
And by the near guess of my memory  
52 I cannot instantly raise up the gross  
Of full three thousand ducats. What of that?  
Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe,  
Will furnish me. But soft, how many months  
Do you desire? *[To Antonio]* Rest you fair, good signor!  
Your worship was the last man in our mouths.

ANTONIO

Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow  
59 By taking nor by giving of excess,

35–36 *What . . . Rialto* (Shylock changes the subject) 38 *publican* tax collector (see Luke 18:9–14, where the humble *publican* is contrasted with the arrogant Pharisee – the allusion works against Shylock's hostility) 39 *for* because 42 *usance* interest 43 *catch . . . hip* i.e., get him in a weak position (figure of speech from wrestling) 50 *store* wealth 52 *gross* full amount 59 *excess* interest

Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend 60  
I'll break a custom. *[To Bassanio]* Is he yet possessed 61  
How much ye would?

SHYLOCK Ay, ay, three thousand ducats.

ANTONIO

And for three months.

SHYLOCK

I had forgot – three months, you told me so.  
Well then, your bond. And let me see – but hear you, 65  
Methoughts you said you neither lend nor borrow 66  
Upon advantage.

ANTONIO I do never use it.

SHYLOCK

When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep – 68  
This Jacob from our holy Abram was,  
As his wise mother wrought in his behalf, 70  
The third possessor; ay, he was the third – 71

ANTONIO

And what of him? Did he take interest?

SHYLOCK

No, not take interest – not as you would say  
Directly interest. Mark what Jacob did:  
When Laban and himself were compromised 75  
That all the eanlings which were streaked and pied 76  
Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes being rank 77  
In end of autumn turnèd to the rams;  
And when the work of generation was  
Between these woolly breeders in the act, 80  
The skillful shepherd peeled me certain wands, 81

60 *ripe* immediate 61–62 *possessed . . . would* informed of how much you want 65 *but hear you* (equivalent to "wait a minute") 66 *Methoughts* it seemed to me 68 *Jacob* (see Genesis 27 and 30:25–43) 71 *third possessor* i.e., of the birthright descending from his grandfather Abraham 75 *compromised* agreed 76 *eanlings* lambs; *pied* spotted 77 *hire* share, recompense; *rank* in heat 81–85 *peeled . . . parti-colored* (Jacob's success depends on the now outmoded theory of prenatal influence: here the variegated *wands* induce variegated *lambs*) 81 *peeled me* peeled (*me* is Shylock's colloquial way of asserting the story's importance to him); *wands* branches, shoots

- 82 And in the doing of the deed of kind  
 83 He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,  
 84 Who then conceiving, did in eaning time  
 85 Fall parti-colored lambs, and those were Jacob's.  
 This was a way to thrive, and he was blessed;  
 87 And thrift is blessing if men steal it not.

ANTONIO

- 88 This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for,  
 A thing not in his power to bring to pass,  
 90 But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven.  
 91 Was this inserted to make interest good?  
 92 Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?

SHYLOCK

I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast.  
 But note me, signor –

ANTONIO

Mark you this, Bassanio,  
 The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
 An evil soul producing holy witness  
 Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
 A goodly apple rotten at the heart.  
 O what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

SHYLOCK

- 100 Three thousand ducats – 'tis a good round sum.  
 Three months from twelve – then let me see, the rate –

ANTONIO

- 102 Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?

SHYLOCK

- Signor Antonio, many a time and oft  
 104 In the Rialto you have rated me  
 About my moneys and my usances.

82 *kind* nature 83 *fulsome* lustful (?) 84 *eaning* lambing 85 *Fall* drop, give birth to 87 *thrift* (etymologically derived from *thrive*) 88–89 *venture* . . . *pass* i.e., a commercial venture of some uncertainty 91 *inserted* . . . *good* brought in to justify charging interest 92 *gold* . . . *rams* (a main Elizabethan argument against usury was that it blasphemously caused inanimate metal to multiply as living creatures did at God's command; see Genesis 8:17 and 9:1) 102 *beholding* in debt 104 *rated* railed at, reviled

- Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,  
 For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe. 107  
 You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,  
 And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine, 109  
 And all for use of that which is mine own. 110  
 Well then, it now appears you need my help.  
 Go to then. You come to me and you say, 112  
 "Shylock, we would have moneys" – you say so,  
 You that did void your rheum upon my beard 114  
 And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur  
 Over your threshold: moneys is your suit.  
 What should I say to you? Should I not say,  
 "Hath a dog money? Is it possible  
 A cur can lend three thousand ducats?" Or 120  
 Shall I bend low, and in a bondman's key,  
 With bated breath and whisp'ring humbleness,  
 Say this:  
 "Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last,  
 You spurned me such a day, another time  
 You called me dog; and for these courtesies  
 I'll lend you thus much moneys."

ANTONIO

- I am as like to call thee so again,  
 To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.  
 If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not 130  
 As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
 A breed for barren metal of his friend? 131  
 But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
 Who if he break, thou mayst with better face 133  
 Exact the penalty.

SHYLOCK Why look you, how you storm!

I would be friends with you and have your love,

107 *suff'rance* forbearance, endurance; *badge* distinctive mark (the word can specifically mean a metal or cloth emblem worn to indicate one's master's family or, in Renaissance Venice, one's Judaism) 109 *gaberdine* cloak 112 *Go to* (exclamation of impatience, like "Come, come!") 114 *rheum* spittle 131 *A* . . . *friend* (see note to l. 92, above) 133 *break* goes bankrupt

Forget the shames that you have stained me with,  
 137 Supply your present wants, and take no doit  
 Of usance for my moneys, and you'll not hear me.  
 139 This is kind I offer.

BASSANIO

140 This were kindness.

SHYLOCK

This kindness will I show:  
 Go with me to a notary; seal me there  
 143 Your single bond, and – in a merry sport –  
 If you repay me not on such a day,  
 In such a place, such sum or sums as are  
 Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit  
 147 Be nominated for an equal pound  
 Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken  
 In what part of your body pleaseth me.

ANTONIO

150 Content, in faith. I'll seal to such a bond,  
 And say there is much kindness in the Jew.

BASSANIO

You shall not seal to such a bond for me!  
 153 I'll rather dwell in my necessity.

ANTONIO

Why fear not, man; I will not forfeit it.  
 Within these two months – that's a month before  
 This bond expires – I do expect return  
 Of thrice three times the value of this bond.

SHYLOCK

O father Abram, what these Christians are,  
 Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect  
 160 The thoughts of others! Pray you tell me this:  
 161 If he should break his day, what should I gain

137 *doit* coin of very small value 139 *kind I offer* i.e., a kindly offer (with a suggestion of "natural" dealing; Antonio has called usury unnatural) 143 *single* without other security; *in . . . sport* i.e., as a jesting penalty (but flesh is *kind*, "natural," which Shylock said he offered) 147 *nominated* named, prescribed; *equal* exact 153 *dwell . . . necessity* i.e., remain in need 161 *break his day* fail to pay on the due date

By the exaction of the forfeiture?  
 A pound of man's flesh taken from a man  
 Is not so estimable, profitable neither,  
 As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. I say  
 To buy his favor I extend this friendship.  
 If he will take it, so; if not, adieu.  
 And for my love I pray you wrong me not.

ANTONIO

Yes, Shylock, I will seal unto this bond. 169

SHYLOCK

Then meet me forthwith at the notary's; 170  
 Give him direction for this merry bond,  
 And I will go and purse the ducats straight, 172  
 See to my house, left in the fearful guard 173  
 Of an unthriftly knave, and presently 174  
 I'll be with you. *Exit.* 175

ANTONIO

Hie thee, gentle Jew.  
 The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind.

BASSANIO

I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.

ANTONIO

Come on. In this there can be no dismay;  
 My ships come home a month before the day. *Exeunt.*

\*

∞ II.1 [*Flourish of cornets.*] Enter [*the Prince of*] Mo-  
 rocco, a tawny Moor all in white, and three or four fol-  
 lowers accordingly, with Portia, Nerissa, and their train.

MOROCCO

Mislike me not for my complexion,

169 *Yes . . . bond* (Antonio does not respond to Shylock's preceding line)  
 172 *purse* procure, gather 173 *fearful* (1) timorous, (2) to be feared (hence  
 suspected) 174 *unthriftly* careless, extravagant 175 *gentle* (with pun on  
 "gentile"?)

II.1 Portia's house, Belmont s.d. *Flourish* distinctive melody introducing  
 important persons; *tawny* (often used by Elizabethans to describe the skin  
 color of North Africans); *accordingly* i.e., the followers are made up and  
 dressed as Morocco is